



Fort A.P. Hill has modified training to help mitigate noise in the community and then successfully communicated this information to local communities. The fort's efforts to engage the community through education and communication has paid off in community support for the installation.

Engaging the community

Fort A.P. Hill Noise Management and Community Outreach Efforts

Fort A.P. Hill was among the early adopters in using noise measurement technology to assess how noise travels past the boundaries of the installation. Noise contours were first calculated back in 1984 and updated in 1997 after a series of key assessments and training modifications. Contours were contained well within the installation boundaries following the changes. Some of the steps Fort A.P. Hill took included the following:

- Moved small arms ranges to south boundary of the post.
- Moved large caliber weapons and demolition training to the interior of the live-fire complex, mindful of prevailing winds and populated areas off post.
- Established “No-Fly Zones” around the communities of Bowling Green and Port Royal.
- Established a 1,200-foot altitude restriction for aircraft off post.
- Routed helicopter traffic over the installation instead of over communities and farms.
- Imposed poundage limits on demolition charges.
- Directed fire of large weapons in a primarily northern direction, to mitigate impacts of prevailing environmental conditions and low frequency-related rattling created by some of these blasts.

- Installed noise monitoring systems with 24/7 capabilities.
- Disallowed night firing after 2300 unless extenuating circumstances.
- Reduced firing on Sunday mornings.
- Restrict firing on overcast days, when possible, and educated range staff and customers of environmental impacts related to firing under sub-optimal weather conditions.
- Established partnership with the local county government related to zoning issues and development of comprehensive plans.

Fort A.P. Hill has also taken their story to the local communities via outreach programs, such as yearly presentations to elected officials, appearances at forums of homeowners and business groups, and tours inside the post where people can see the sources and locations of the booms and bangs – thus taking some of the mystery out of it for them.

Three years ago, the citizen notification of noise-related issues was renamed from “Noise Complaint” to “Noise Report.” This followed an intensive education and outreach effort that included information on the nature of noise generated by the installation and ongoing efforts to apply science and common sense to minimize disruption to their lifestyle. The need for citizens to report disturbing noise generated by military activities was emphasized. Through these efforts, the local citizens were the ones to propose the name change from “complaint” to “report”.

During this outreach effort, noise monitors were placed at the homes of some citizens who alleged damage from training noise. Admittedly, this could be seen as a risk from a legal standpoint. Certainly, it had the potential to verify that noise decibel levels were sufficient to cause structural or cosmetic damage. Typically, however, these citizens learned that the noise levels, while disruptive, were not sufficient to create the situations they were describing. Monitoring data was available both to concerned citizens and internally to assess training events likely to generate noise or rumbling vibration. This also added to the body of knowledge about how specific weapon systems generate noise under varied weather conditions and in specific geographic areas off post.

After these efforts, while a small number of people still call to complain, many more people call to advise the installation of noise disturbances as opposed to complain. For example, the following is a typical call: "You said to call...this isn't a complaint, but the shots were getting loud and we were wondering how long they'd be continuing or if you need to pull some data from your noise monitors, etc." Therefore, some of the installation's neighbors have made the cognitive and behavioral leap from being vocal critics to being collaborative partners in helping the installation better manage noise.

Education was a key component in this change. Noise and vibration from training activities have been related to national defense and security. In addition, the installation's positive and sincere efforts at being a good neighbor have been highlighted. Besides educating citizens, the installation has made an effort to educate the training units. By communicating the need for mitigating noise to the units, the training units can help in the efforts to ensure community support.

Beyond managing noise events, Fort A.P. Hill is aggressively working to stave off encroachment. The most common type of encroachment (incompatible use) to a military training installation is residential development.

Fort A.P. Hill is taking this issue directly to local communities, both the citizenry and local governments. Right now, encroachment isn't a big problem at Fort A.P. Hill, and a lot of the credit for that comes from the relationship of the installation with the Board of Supervisors and citizens of Caroline. Successes come through systematic efforts, as well as individual cases. Fort A.P. Hill enjoys a special relationship with the county's zoning technical review board and has the opportunity to weigh in on any proposed rezoning adjacent to or near the installation. Additionally, proposals are now on the table that would direct specific language in property deeds, advising people building homes or buying homes in proximity to the post that they are locating their residence in close proximity to a military field training area and that noise is almost a certainty.

Several years ago, it was not uncommon for realtors to call the post public affairs office to ask if any heavy training or firing would be taking place on a particular morning or afternoon. This was, presumably, so that they could neglect to inform a prospective buyer about the nature of their neighbor's business. Newcomers absent knowledge of the area and mission of the post could erroneously assume that the rural setting meant the norm would be honking geese instead of the occasional thunder of artillery or plastic explosives, bursts of machine guns, or the beating of helicopter blades.

To ensure a modicum of awareness, the installation designed billboards that portrayed a strong graphic image of military training, often with a .50 caliber machine gun or shoulder-fired, high explosive anti-armor weapon, and supporting text that read, "Where America's Military Sharpens Its Combat Edge." These were placed at four gates along major travel corridors. This was one simple way the installation tried to inform the community on the installation and the installation's purpose. The very visible water tower along U.S. 301 was also painted with an image of a Soldier firing a weapon.

The consistent message to stakeholders is that military mission readiness generates noise. Aircraft must fly; troops must move and shoot. It's far better to learn how to do it here rather than face on the job training on some foreign battlefield when the personal and national stakes are so much higher.

For more information about the Army's noise management program, contact:

Operational Noise Program
U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine
MCHB-TS-EON
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403
410-436-3829
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dehe/morenoise/>

For more information on the Navy's

noise management program, contact:

Special Assistant for AICUZ and Encroachment
Commander Navy Installations
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
Washington Navy Yard, Washington DC 20374
202-685-9181

For more information on the Air Force's noise management program, contact:

AICUZ/Noise Program Manager
Bases and Units Branch
HQ USAF/ILEPB
1260 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330.
703-604-5277

For more information on the Marine Corp's noise management program, contact:

Community and Land Use Planner
Headquarter Marine Corps
Washington DC, 20380-1775
703-695-8240, ext 3350